



AP

A U.S. Marine from the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit from Camp Pendleton, Calif., holds his M-16 with grenade launcher as he prepares to go on patrol outside Camp Rhino in southern Afghanistan on Thursday.

Hurlburt general talks about role of special tactics forces

By KIMBERLY BLAIR

Daily News Staff Writer

HURLBURT FIELD — Lt. Gen. Maxwell C. Bailey said that members of Air Force special tactics have been an integral part of the special forces on the ground in Afghanistan.

"Special Operations by their nature are joint," said Bailey, commander of Air Force Special Operations Command at Hurlburt Field.

"Throughout this two-month campaign, you've heard a lot about special forces on the ground (in Afghanistan) working with allies and doing amazing things. Embedded within each of these elements are fully integrated, highly skilled special tactics warriors," he said.

AFSOC has special tactics forces based at Hurlburt and other bases around the United

Please see GENERAL/A8

GENERAL

From A1

States and Europe.

"It's an exciting thing and little known that the Air Force has such specialties," he said.

Bailey talked about the unique roles of special tactics forces, known as the quiet professionals, during a ceremony to award one of his combat controllers with a Purple Heart.

Those fighters are specialized combat medics called pararescuemen and combat controllers like Staff Sgt. Michael, the Air Force's first Purple Heart recipient for Operation Enduring Freedom.

Michael, 27, was wounded from an explosion in a fortress during an uprising of Taliban fighters in Mazar-e-Sharif on Nov. 26.

These men have had the opportunity to put the full range of their skills and capabilities to work in the toughest environment, Bailey said.

Some of that four-year training is done at Hurlburt.

"There is not a single thing that our air combat controllers — air terminal control, drop and landing zone controls, communications, or command and control between air and ground forces — not a single thing that is not within their repertoire that they have not done. And the same goes for the pararescuemen," he said.

Combat controllers are trained to shoot, move and communicate with the other special operators, including Army special forces and Navy SEALs.

"We have the same skills to get to the fight as they do. We jump, dive, all those things," Bailey said.

Combat controllers' primary mission is to serve as Air Force air traffic controllers. They operate in forward battle areas, drop or landing zones.

Pararescuemen are premier trauma medicine specialists who take care of a person in the first hour after they are injured, he said.

Bailey would not give details, but he confirmed that members from AFSOC continue to participate in missions in Afghanistan just as they have in the past two months.

He pointed out that along with the gunships, Navy and Air Force bombing missions have created safer conditions in which ground troops are operating.

Aiding in the success, he said, are AC-130 gunships and their crews. The gunships are also based at Hurlburt with the 16th Special Operations Wing.

"It has been a real success story," said Bailey, of the gunships.

"You always worry about the gunship operating in a hostile air defense environment," he said.

The huge gunships fly night operations, generally low, which makes them easier targets for ground anti-aircraft artillery fire.

A shoulder-launched missile shot one down during Operation Desert Storm 10 years ago.

Loaded with state-of-the-art equipment and 40- and 105-mm cannons, it's one of the Air Force's most powerful weapons.

"Its air power, and other elements that the military power has, has set the condition that has permitted us to do the things we do best," said Bailey.

■ Staff Writer Kimberly Blair can be reached at 936-8600 or kimb@nwdailynews.com